

19. ON SOME NEW BREEDING RECORDS OF WATERBIRDS FROM THE DELHI REGION

The most comprehensive account of the birds of Delhi region exists in Usha Ganguli's book, *A guide to the birds of the Delhi area* (Ganguli 1975). In this work 404 species are described of which over 150 are recorded as residents, either with breeding records or collected with enlarged gonads. Ganguli's work is largely based on her own observations till her death in 1971 and a compilation of contemporary and earlier records. However, from some of our recent field work in the Delhi region it emerged that some species of waterbirds which have been described as having a "vague" breeding status actually breed in this area. Our coverage of wetland habitats in and around Delhi was broadly the same as in the earlier work, with a few exceptions. In this paper I intend to make a note of these, possibly new breeding records.

1. **Rosy Pelican** (*Pelecanus onocrotalus*)

Ali and Ripley (1983) refer to it as resident, at least in part in the Indian subcontinent and "mainly winter visitor to West Pakistan and North India...". Abdulali and Pandey (1978) record it as a migrant in the Delhi-Agra-Bharatpur triangle while Rai (1983) does not mention it in his checklist of the birds of Meerut region. Ganguli records a couple of instances when Rosy Pelican were seen in large numbers in the wetlands of Delhi region and says, "In December 1969 more than 200 birds were present in Sultanpur jheel; of these 13 or 14 were young birds in brown plumage."

I have seen wild Rosy Pelican breeding in the ponds of the Delhi Zoo (Urfi 1993a). During 1989-1991 I saw their nest on the ground (on islands in the zoo ponds) underneath the canopy of *Prosopis* trees and was informed by the zoo authorities that some of the females among the pinioned pelican's, of the zoo's open-air exhibits, were impregnated by wild males which fly in and out of the premises. Since the early 1990's till now wild Rosy Pelicans have been regularly visiting the zoo and there have been more instances of breeding.

2. **White Ibis** (*Threskiornis aethiopica*)

Ali and Ripley (loc. cit.) record it as resident and nomadic in the Indian subcontinent. Abdulali and

Pandey record it as a local migrant/resident while Rai refers to it as a local migrant. Ganguli says, "Occurs at various times of the year, but there was no breeding record for Delhi till September 1, 1969, when P. Jackson found a small nesting colony near Sultanpur Jheel." She does not mention any other nesting record.

I have seen White Ibis nesting in the heronries of the Delhi Zoo along with painted stork, egrets and cormorants. The zoo official's claim that White Ibis started nesting here as a result of the zoo's programme of releasing some captive-bred birds in 1989 (Urfi 1992). During August-September 1992 I saw at least 23 nests (with chicks in many of them) at Tilyar Lake, about 50 km from Delhi in the Rohtak District of Haryana (Urfi 1993b). Besides these two sites there are several anecdotal accounts of White Ibis nests in the Delhi region.

3. **Lesser Whistling Teal or Tree Duck** (*Dendrocygna javanica*)

In the Indian subcontinent this bird is resident and partial local migrant. Regarding its nesting Ali and Ripley (loc. cit.) mention that it nests mostly in the hollow of trees but also sometimes builds nests on the ground, among reeds and scrub bordering a tank or jheel. Abdulali and Pandey record it as a local migrant/resident in their checklist while Rai records it as a winter migrant in the Meerut region. Ganguli records it as a winter visitor and very uncommon. Regarding its breeding status she says, "In November 1969 during the 10th General Assembly of the I.U.C.N., at one of the outings we saw 4 adults with 6 young birds swimming in Sultanpur jheel. They were at a distance, but Peter Scott identified them as Lesser Whistling Teals, a breeding record after nearly a century."

I have seen Lesser Whistling Teal on several occasions at the Okhla barrage during 1989-1992. On August 26, 1990 I saw a family of 2 adults and 6 chicks swimming in the barrage near the shore. As I walked closer one of the adults climbed the shore and did the 'broken wing/injury display'. While I watched this display the chicks and the other parent had drifted several meters away in the deeper zone

of the barrage.

4. Bronzewinged Jacana (*Metopidius indicus*)

According to Ali and Ripley, this bird is resident, common and wide spread throughout the Indian subcontinent, excepting Western Punjab and Western Rajasthan. Abdulali and Pandey record it as resident in the Delhi-Agra-Bharatpur triangle while Rai does not record it from the Meerut region. Ganguli records it as a vagrant with only three records from the Delhi region. One of these concerns an immature bird seen twice (on 8th and 23rd March, 1953) at Senipura jheel about 32 km east of Delhi. On another occasion in May 1966 an adult was seen collecting water-weeds in a swamp — the season and its behaviour suggested that it might be nesting.

I have seen Bronzewinged Jacana on several occasions at the Okhla barrage during 1989-1992. In September 1990 I saw 2 adults and 2 juveniles in a seepage pond close to the Okhla barrage. Although this pond was used by local people for cultivating *Trapa* (Singhara) and there used to human disturbance, I saw this family many times.

I thank Suresh Sharma for help in the field and commenting on an earlier draft. I thank CSIR, New Delhi for supporting my studies on waterbirds, at several stages.

January 31, 1995

ABDUL JAMIL URFI

A-270, Jamia Nagar, Okhla, New Delhi 110 025.

REFERENCES

- ABDULALI, H. & J.D. PANDEY (1978): Checklist of the birds of Delhi, Agra and Bharatpur. Popular Press, Bombay.
 ALI, S. & S.D. RIPLEY (1983): Handbook of the birds of India and Pakistan. (Compact edition). Oxford University Press, Delhi.
 GANGULI, U. (1975): A guide to the birds of the Delhi area. Indian Council of Agricultural Research, Delhi.
 RAI, Y.M. (1983): Birds of Meerut Region. Vardhman Printers,

- Meerut.
 URFI, A.J. (1992): The significance of Delhi Zoo for Water-bird Conservation. *International Zoo News*. 39/2: 13-16.
 URFI, A.J. (1993a): The birdlife of Okhla. *Sanctuary Asia* 13: 50-53.
 URFI, A.J. (1993b): Heronries in the Delhi region of India. *Oriental Bird Club Bull.* 17: 19-21.

20. RECENT ADDITIONS TO THE BIRD LIST OF THE LAKSHADWEEP ISLANDS

In a recent paper, Kurup and Zacharias (1994) have summarized and listed out the birds so far reported from the Lakshadweep archipelago. They have compiled a list of 104 species reported between 1876 and 1992. Earlier, Daniels (1992) had put together a list of birds seen by him and others who visited these islands and related the biogeographical theories to the patterns of bird distribution in the Lakshadweep Archipelago.

The paper by Kurup and Zacharias includes species recorded by us in 1990-91, during the course of our survey of the nesting terns on the Pitti sandbank and some nearby islands. We had seen a total of 48 species of birds (including three unidentified) in the course of four visits and eleven of these are new records for the Lakshadweep Islands. A detailed report on the status of the breeding terns and the conservation measures suggested is published elsewhere (Mathew *et al.* 1991). We now give some details of our sightings of the eleven species recorded

for the first time with some comments on their distribution in the adjoining Maldivic Islands.

Large(?) Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo*

Two birds were seen in flight over Kavaratti on 28 October 1990, close to the helipad, located at the southern tip of the island. Later one of the birds flew closer. We could see the white throat and hooked bill, besides the overall dark plumage. As the sighting was very brief, it is treated as unconfirmed. This species has not been reported from the Maldives (Ash and Shafeeg 1994).

Yellow Bittern *Ixobrychus sinensis*

On 28 April 1991, a single bird was spotted on Bangaram Island, at the pond behind the Casino Hotel. The bird was seen flying to a bush overhanging the water and a few minutes later, it was again seen in flight. This species has been reported twice in the Maldives (Phillips 1963) and more recently an individual was recorded in captivity (Ash and Shafeeg 1994).